

CONGRATULATING THE DILLARD
HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' BASKET-
BALL TEAM ON THEIR STATE
CHAMPIONSHIP

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the girls' basketball team of Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Led by Coach Marcia Pinder, whose 776–171 career record is top among all Florida basketball coaches, male or female, the Panthers crowned a 22–7 season by winning the Florida state championship for the second consecutive year. Under Coach Pinder's tutelage, the Dillard girls have consistently been recognized for being among the best at their sport, having won six titles overall.

In this year's title game, the Panthers led most of the way and, with their key rebounds and clutch free throws, the game, which went to overtime, and the title ultimately belonged to Dillard.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the Lady Panthers and Coach Pinder, who have once again reached the pinnacle of success in their sport, and I am glad that they represent my district. They are all fine sportswomen and people of whom we can all be very proud. It is my distinguished honor to recognize their achievements.

23RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE MAS-
SACRE OF ARMENIAN CIVILIANS
IN AZERBAIJAN

HON. BRAD SHERMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I speak today in solemn remembrance of a dark chapter in modern history. This past weekend marked the 23rd anniversary of the massacre of Armenian civilians in Azerbaijan. On the evening of February 27, 1988, a three-day rampage against Armenian civilians living in Sumgait, in Soviet Azerbaijan, began.

Armenian civilians were maimed, raped, beaten, and burned alive at the hands of rioters. International media outlets reported that Armenians were "hunted" down and killed in their homes.

The calls for help for those innocent Armenians were ignored by the local police, and the victims' fate was left to those who ruthlessly and senselessly ended their lives.

The official figure from Soviet authorities, who had prohibited journalists from entering the area, was just over 30 people dead and over 200 injured. However, many believe that in fact hundreds were murdered.

Sadly, Sumgait was not the end to the tragedies. Anti-Armenian pogroms followed in Kirovabad on November 21, 1988 and in Baku on January 13, 1990. During the Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1988 to 1994, Armenian civilian population centers were indiscriminately attacked.

If we hope to stop future massacres, and conflicts, we need to acknowledge those hor-

rific acts of the past, make sure they do not happen again, and make sure that we do not have renewed war between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. That is why I would like to commemorate the victims of the Sumgait massacre.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. WILLIAM R. KEATING

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Speaker, on Friday, February 18, 2011, had I voted, I would have voted "no" on rollcall No. 93.

Additionally, on February 16, 2011, it was my intention to vote "yes" on rollcall No. 57.

WE HAVE LOST A FRIEND

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 3, 2011

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today because of a tragic event—the March 2 assassination of Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, a heroic man of faith whose courageous and outspoken leadership against his nation's draconian blasphemy law made him a prime target of extremist Islamist elements in his country.

Bhatti was the only Christian member of the Pakistani cabinet.

We have lost a friend and an ally and our prayers are with Bhatti's family and those in Pakistan who mourn his loss and who stood with him in his fight against injustice and intolerance. Bhatti devoted his life to defending the most vulnerable—he is literally a modern day martyr.

Among those whose causes he championed were Asia Bibi, a young Christian mother of five, who was sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy law. Only after international intervention was her execution delayed. Her fate, however, remains unclear.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are often used to victimize both religious minorities and Muslims. In fact, Punjab's influential governor, Salman Taseer was shot and killed by his own bodyguard who reportedly told police, "that he killed Mr. Taseer because of the governor's opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy law."

With Bhatti's life tragically cut short, a critical moderating voice in Pakistan has been lost. And I fear others will be silenced if justice is not brought to bear in Pakistan. Bhatti spoke of the importance of these voices during a recent Washington Post editorial board meeting. I submit for the RECORD a piece by Post editorial page editor, Fred Hiatt, who recalled Bhatti's message, "that millions of Pakistanis remain committed to a vision of a Muslim country living in peace with its neighbors and with non-Muslims within its borders." Hiatt continued, "As it became increasingly dangerous for such people to speak up, they were becoming decreasingly visible. But they are still there, Bhatti told us, and he urged Americans not to forsake or forget them."

This must be our clarion call in the days to come.

I urge the Government of Pakistan to seek justice in this case and to give Bhatti a state funeral, reflective of the import of his life and legacy. Similarly, I urge our own government to send a high-ranking delegation to attend the funeral and to carry Bhatti's torch in continuing to press for the repeal of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

I also submit an Associated Press story which references the fact that Bhatti was "aware of the danger he faced, saying in a videotaped message that he had received death threats from al-Qaida and the Taliban." The video was recorded several months before his ultimate assassination and can be viewed at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/02/pakistan-minister-shot-dead-islamabad>.

Bhatti pointedly says he will continue to speak out for persecuted Christians and other religious minorities. In a chilling allusion to future events, he says, "I will die to defend their rights."

Indeed Bhatti's convictions cost him his life. He must not have died in vain.

ANOTHER MODERATE IN PAKISTAN IS
ASSASSINATED
(By Fred Hiatt)

Shahbaz Bhatti, who was assassinated outside his home in Pakistan today, came to visit a few of us at The Post one month ago. He was soft-spoken and matter-of-fact about the dangers he faced—and about his refusal, almost his inability, to trim his sails to lessen those dangers. The risks he faced, as a voice for tolerance in an increasingly intolerant country, were risks that Pakistan faced—and if he and like-minded figures stopped speaking up, what future would the country have?

Bhatti was a Christian in an overwhelmingly Muslim country, a minister in the government in charge of minority affairs, and most of all an unimaginably courageous voice of moderation. He opposed the nation's anti-blasphemy law, which increasingly is being used to silence and oppress. When another moderate leader, Punjab governor Salman Taseer, was killed two months ago, his assassin frighteningly became a hero for many in Pakistan. Bhatti was one of the few public figures willing to forthrightly condemn the murder.

Now Bhatti, too, is gone. There will be investigations, I suppose, into why his police guard was absent when gunmen surrounded his Toyota sedan this morning, despite calls from many (including Americans like Virginia Republican Rep. Frank Wolf) for increased security. There will be tributes and mourning, but they will be muted. Hopefully there will be deep thinking inside the U.S. government about what it can do to better support the forces of moderation.

On that subject, I remember two essential messages from Bhatti's visit. He said Americans maintained too little contact with the part of Pakistani civil society that believes in interfaith tolerance, that sees Islam as a peaceful religion willing to live alongside others. Bhatti himself had organized a network of such people, he told us, but U.S. officials were too busy dealing with the government, army and intelligence agencies to show support or even establish much contact.

His second message was that millions of Pakistanis remain committed to a vision of a Muslim country living in peace with its neighbors and with non-Muslims within its borders. As it became increasingly dangerous for such people to speak up, they were becoming decreasingly visible. But they are still there, Bhatti told us, and he urged Americans not to forsake or forget them.